

as those of barn-door fowls to ourselves. I have stayed at a farm at Cape Point, where a pair of the birds were nesting within fifty yards of the house, in a small paddock, and have seen the hen on the nest.

An interesting subject of inquiry, however, seems to me to be still open in the matter. It is, How far do the habits of nidification of the ostrich vary in the different climates through which it ranges? The nest of the ostrich is commonly described as a heap of sand, and so no doubt it is in warm desert regions; but the nest which I saw at the Cape was carefully built of grass and other warm materials, so as to aid in retaining heat. The birds kept the nest almost constantly covered between them.

In warmer regions, however, the hen appears often to leave the nest in the daytime, and it is just possible that where the temperature is very high the hen may not incubate at all, and the cock alone may do so at night. I merely wish to point out that it should not be assumed that the habits of the ostrich as to incubation are necessarily the same in the various climates of Africa with those to be observed in the Cape region.

I have noticed that at the Zoological Gardens the ostriches at the breeding season are supplied every year with a cartload of silver sand as the traditional nest. It would not be amiss to try them with some more substantial materials as an experiment, and prove whether in our climate they would not build a warm nest as at the Cape.

That birds' eggs can be hatched like those of turtles in mere sand is undoubtedly a fact. The Megapodius inhabiting Cape York, Australia, makes, as is well known, a huge mound of vegetable matter, which by decomposition supplies the necessary warmth to hatch the eggs; but at the Philippine Islands another Megapodius buries its eggs in the perfectly clean calcareous sand near the seashore.

The habits of the emu in nesting have been carefully watched at Blenheim. The head keeper told me not long ago that the cock alone incubates. The hens lay their eggs anywhere about in the grass, the cock builds a nest, and rolls the eggs to it, the hen sometimes endeavouring to prevent him and to break them. I believe an account of observations on the habits of the emu at Blenheim were published by Mr. Frank Buckland.

H. N. MOSELEY

Bonchurch Hotel, Isle of Wight, March 26

### Holothurians

My experience of about three months in Bermuda and Jamaica fully bears out Mr. Guppy and Mr. Kent's view that the Holothurians do not feed on living coral. They were moderately common in both localities close to the shore, where corals are comparatively scarce, and are mainly of the massive kinds, such as the *Astræas*, against which the tentacles of a Holothurian would be useless. There were a few branching *Oculinas* here and there, but not enough to support the Holothurians. But further, some of the latter bury their bodies in the mud or sand, leaving only the tentacles exposed; and I have watched these thrusting their tentacles into their stomachs right up to the base in the comical way described by Mr. Kent. It is quite clear that these were not feeding on living coral. I did not, however, see them actually taking up sand and shell and thrusting it down, as Mr. Kent did; in fact I was puzzled as to what they were feeding on. From the way the tentacles were set, standing nearly erect, I fancied they were catching swimming creatures, as other tentacled animals do. This idea is supported, though not proved, by a fine specimen from the Zoological Station at Naples, which has a half-swallowed fish protruding from its mouth. The specimen is in the Bristol Museum. It proves at all events that they do not reject this kind of food. Possibly in default of it they may fall back upon sand and shell, and the minute organisms contained in these. Some of my experiences with these creatures were interesting. At Bermuda two large kinds used to lie quite exposed in shallow water. I might have guessed from this that they would probably be protected in some way. I used to wade along shore carrying a fishing-basket and a landing-net, and one day, as my basket was full, I put a couple into the landing-net to carry home. As their skins were quite hard, I thought they would travel well so. After handling them, I found my hands smarted a little, and the irritation lasted till bedtime. I found that little bits of their skin had got under mine, and this caused the irritation. As I was going home, I found my Holothurians were literally melting away; long streamers of a colourless gelatinous substance were

hanging down between the meshes. Of course I threw the nasty things away, and had a dreadful job to get the net clean. I attributed my misfortune to the sun, so another day I packed a couple up comfortably at the bottom of my basket, which is very closely made. After an hour or two I was horrified to find long streamers hanging down from the basket of the same horrible substance. They had literally gone to pieces again, and spoilt everything in the basket. Shortly after, I left for Jamaica, and there I took out a wide-mouthed bottle and brought one home in triumph. Being engaged that evening, I left the Holothurian in the bottle all night. Next morning the creature was all there, but he had cleared out the whole of his inside; his intestinal canal and the beautiful tree-like organ were perfect. The latter was still alive and was waving about in the water in the prettiest way, and looking remarkably like branchiae. Some accessory organs along the intestinal canal were exhibiting rhythmic pulsations. Altogether it was a most interesting sight. But my poor Holothurian was only a tube. I did not know at the time that he could grow a complete new inside.

Clifton College

J. G. GRENFELL

### The British Circumpolar Expedition

SUPPLEMENTARY to the very interesting notice in NATURE (p. 484) of the above expedition, permit me to give a brief extract from a letter recently received from Capt. Dawson, as follows:—"I have heard of a large cavern about a day from this (Fort Rae), which I shall try and explore. There are some eyeless fish that live there, that I hope may turn out to be a new species." I do trust Capt. Dawson may be able to carry out his intention, but he must be heavily weighted with work, in which he appears to take a deep interest. I had long ago been told of this cave and its fish, but had no time to visit it, never having been within one or two hundred miles of the place.

March 24

J. RAE

### Meteor

MR. MASHEDER's account in your last number of NATURE (p. 483) of the meteor seen by him at Ashby-de-la-Zouch on March 17, corresponds in some particulars with the inclosed note of one seen by myself on the same evening at Malvern. I am therefore inclined to send it you.

The discrepancies are in the time, which Mr. Masheder states to have been 7.5, while here the meteor passed at 6.56 p.m.; also in his description of "pieces dropping," I noticed no such appearance, but simply the not unusual one of rapidly recurring scintillations in the train.

Great Malvern, March 17, 6.56 p.m.

This evening a bright flame-coloured meteor with a short scintillating train, nucleus the brightness of Jupiter, passed rapidly across the sky. When first seen it was beneath the moon, then shining brightly, and was apparently about the altitude of Betelgeux, at that time nearly 10° past the meridian. It disappeared behind the hills almost due west, but so quickly that it was difficult to determine its course with any exactitude.

Lambert House, Great Malvern, March 25 E. BROWN

### Mimicry

SUCH remarkable instances of mimicry as that described by the Duke of Argyll in NATURE, vol. xxvii. p. 125, as occurring in a moth, make heavy demands upon the faith of the non-scientific reasoner, since it seems to him impossible that organic Nature in her "blind groping in the dark" could, under any imaginable combination of circumstances, have succeeded in taking the successive steps requisite to bring her to such a state of perfect adaptation to condition. But the proverbially keen sight of birds, as at present organised, is apt to lead to erroneous inferences with regard to the evolution of protective mimicry in their insect prey, seeing that the high development of this faculty now attained by them renders nugatory any disguise that is not almost perfect. The theory of natural selection, however, requires the gradual perfecting of this, no less than of other structural and physiological acquirements; and there is no reason for supposing that the Ornithoscelidan ancestors of the feathered tribes possessed exceptional visual powers, but rather that the reverse was the case; so that it may be concluded that improvement in vision and in rapidity of flight proceeded *pari passu*. This being granted, the initiatory steps of mimicry in

the *Lepidoptera* may have been tentative, and well within the competence of ordinary variability.

The above sufficiently trite train of thought has been suggested to me by the consideration of analogous facts known to every angler. Many fishes greedily snap at anything that glistens or is highly coloured, especially if it be rapidly drawn through the water, and the slight additional disguise imparted to artificial bait of this description by a spinning motion renders it very attractive. The highly specialised salmon is easily deceived, and the most killing artificial flies for this fish make no pretence to resemble anything in nature, and are attractive in proportion to their gaudiness. The same is true of his congener the trout, although this fish appears to be somewhat more æsthetic in his tastes; and the most useful artificial flies employed to entice him are mere generalised imitations of his natural food. Indeed, on these grounds no less than on those of anatomy, it cannot be doubted that the *Teleostei*—albeit highly specialised of their kind—have failed to develop that acuteness of vision which their rapid movements would seem to render desirable, and are yet in the stage in which a very imperfect mimicry misleads them; and it is not an unreasonable presumption that birds were once in a very similar condition, from which they have emerged in consequence of the necessity for frequent and abundant supplies of food entailed upon them by their active mode of life. Under these circumstances it must have gone hard with the helpless caterpillar, so toothsome and nutritious, seeing that he could not, like the mature *Phryganide* and *Ephemeride*, keep out of harm's way by shunning the element inhabited by his natural foe; and hence arose the necessity for his protective modification. How urgent was the need for this is amply shown by the fact that several distinct modes of protection have been enlisted in his defence, viz. cuticular hypertrophy resulting in hairiness, mimicry of the vegetation on which he feeds and lives, and unpalatable flavour; to which has been superadded mimicry of the unpalatable forms by those of good flavour. But even with all this adventitious aid the struggle would probably have proved exterminating to him by reason of the voracity of birds, had not the teeming imago participated in the protective modifications, and thereby been enabled to maintain the balance of supply and demand necessary for the survival of the order.

Wycombe Court, Bucks

PAUL HENRY STOKOE

#### Threatened Extinction of the Elephant

THE threatened extinction of any existing species of plant or animal cannot fail to be matter of real concern to all students of science, who ought to neglect no feasible means for preventing so deplorable an occurrence.

Of the few gigantic mammals still living on the surface of our planet, none possesses more interest and none are more worthy preservation than the elephant. Yet it is an accepted conclusion that the elephant is doomed to extinction, and that within a measurable period of time this majestic quadruped will have suffered the fate of the Dodo. Cannot such a calamity be prevented? Surely the destruction of elephants might be legally controlled (in India, at any rate), and their capture (for domestication) might be limited, as it is well known they never breed in confinement. The continuous rise in the market-price of ivory, and its recent unprecedented scarcity as an article of commerce, are ominous signs, and renders it incumbent on the votaries of science to consider what may be done in the matter. It is no question of mere sentiment—it is of vital importance; and if "ancient monument, ruins, &c." are worth protecting, it cannot be denied that so remarkable and interesting a creature as our colossal Pachyderm merits some effort in his behalf.

EDWARD E. PRINCE

United College, University of St. Andrews, March 15

#### A Curious Case of Ignition

ONE fine morning recently, as two ladies were standing together in the drawing-room of a house in this neighbourhood, smoke was observed to rise from the dress of one of them. This was found to be due to ignition by the solar rays focused on her dress by the lens of a graphoscope which stood on the table. Similar cases of accidental concentration of the sun's rays have, I am aware, been recorded. It would be interesting to know whether any serious fires have thus originated. One can easily imagine circumstances which would favour such results from a simple cause.

Finchley, March 26

M.

#### SINGING, SPEAKING, AND STAMMERING<sup>1</sup>

##### I.—SINGING

THE voice, essentially a musical instrument, has only of late been scientifically considered. Even now singing is too much dealt with as an art, and its acquirement as an accomplishment. The professional mystery with which it is surrounded serves no good purpose, and favours empiricism. At ladies' schools the old fiction of what are quaintly termed "finishing lessons" still survives; they often succeed in finishing any prospects the pupil may have had of becoming a singer. Most of the current primers and tutors are ludicrously vague and feeble, many methods are absolutely injurious to the voice; for the improvement of which one ingenious inventor has suggested the use of a false palate, and another the fitting of singers' mouths with a sort of bell-shaped snout or proboscis to act as a resonator. A chorus of such proboscidians on the Handel orchestra would be an appalling sight. The real foundation of our knowledge rests on the researches of Helmholtz on the physical, and of Garcia on the physiological, side. The classical discoveries of the former as to the production of vowel-sounds by the superaddition of a varying harmonic in the mouth-cavity, and of the latter by the examination of the larynx in action by means of a mirror, brought before the Royal Society in May, 1855, have formed the substratum of much which has now become the common property of scientific men. Dr. Bristowe, in his Lumleian lectures of 1879, has added some pathological data of considerable value, and Dr. Walshe, in his "Dramatic Singing, Physiologically Estimated," has touched on points connected with the sympathetic and emotional power which this most perfect of instruments can be made to exercise. It owes this in a great measure to the fact that it can combine musical sounds with significant words, and thus interest at once the ear and the intelligence. After a demonstration of the action of the larynx and fauces in phonation, illustrated by some excellent photographs taken from his own larynx by Mr. Emil Behnke, and thrown on the screen, vowel-sounds were shown to be thirteen in number in the English language, with six more in French and German, fifteen of these being oral in origin, and four, all French sounds, nasal. Consonants were about sixteen in number, and had been called "noises" by Max Müller, owing to their comparatively unmusical character. They are chiefly caused by some check or obstruction to the laryngeal note. A diagram of Madame Seiler's was, however, shown which indicates that there is an oral resonance-note even for consonants, though it is much more obscure and uncertain than that of the vowels. Melville Bell's division of vocal sounds into vowels, consonants, and glides or semivowels was adverted to, and his ingenious device of visible speech briefly explained, but left for fuller consideration in the second lecture. The contrast was then pointed out between singing, in which the musical notes predominate and are separate or discrete; intoning, which is speech intentionally rendered monotonous for better transmission in large spaces like cathedrals; recitative, which is the converse of the former, being singing partially loosened from the trammels of time, rhythm, and melody, so as to approximate to speaking; speech itself, which uses continuous inflection; declaiming, which is speech with the addition of a histrionic and emotional element; reading, which is a faint and as it were distant reproduction of speaking in a lower key, quieter and less marked in accent than in speaking *viva voce*; and whispering, which is purely oral, without a laryngeal ground note, and which may be termed voiceless speech.

The different qualities, compass, and register of voices

<sup>1</sup> Abstract by the Author of three Lectures at the Royal Institution, by W. H. Stone, M.D.F.R.C.P.